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ABSTRACT

Intended for use by teams of educators to spark discussion about current practices and how well their own approaches match identified best practices, this poster suggests nine effective literacy practices associated with improved student performance in the early grades. The nine practices are from a study of elementary schools with higher than average performance on literacy outcomes. Folded in four panels, the poster's back panel presents a short description of the poster, its genesis, and its uses. Opening the first fold, the two inner panels together offer descriptions of nine off-target literacy practices in the early grades that will not lead to strong student performance. Opening each of those folds shows the full poster describing nine on-target literacy practices. These discuss balancing phonics and literature, emphasis on literacy, small groups, staff relationships, professional development, student-centered setting, test preparation, use of information, and role of parents. The poster reminds educators that it is the sum total of practices that makes the difference for student results and the overall school culture--not any one practice. It notes that a discussion could begin with either the on-target poster or the off-target list. (SR)

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ED 450 341

9 Effective Literacy Practices

Based on the Indicators of Capacity for School Reform Project's Massachusetts Literacy Study Findings

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Schools often target several key areas in their efforts to improve student literacy, but sometimes the practices they adopt do not achieve intended results. Below is a list of some important areas in literacy education and sample practices that miss the target.

Off-Target Literacy Practices for the Early Grades

Balancing literature and phonics

Staff rely on basal textbooks/reading series to determine the balance of phonics and literature, and rarely supplement the curriculum.

Individual staff choose their own instructional techniques, materials, and assessments for literacy instruction in their classrooms, without coordination within and between grade levels.

Emphasis on literacy

Because of other regular or occasional school activities, not all students participate in a reading period each day of the school year.

The only opportunity for students to read and write occurs during their designated small group time with the teacher.

Small groups

Staff have reduced the size of groups for literacy instruction, but continue to use techniques suited for whole-group instruction.

During small group instruction, most students do seat work using worksheets, while a small group of students receives literacy instruction.

Staff relationships

Teachers are dedicated to their students, but focus only on their own classrooms not on the needs of the whole school.

The principal is so involved in daily administrative operation of the school that he/she does not have time to take actions that build teacher expertise and morale.

Professional development

Staff participate in professional development activities, but there is no expectation that they will change their classroom practice.

Opportunities for peer modeling, cross-grade discussion about student work, peer coaching, and team teaching are rare.

Professional development does not address the school culture necessary to support changes in classroom practice.

Student-centered setting

Schedules of staff and specialists are routinized and do not typically change.

Most students stay in the same instructional groups throughout the year.

Test preparation

Students are exposed to practice test items only for standardized test administration.

Staff use practice-test materials to expose students to test items but do not analyze item results to understand instructional needs.

Use of information

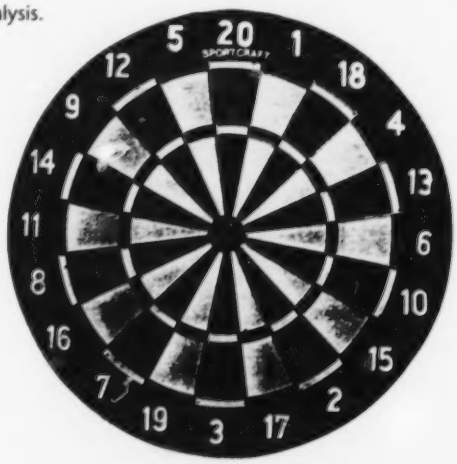
Report cards are the primary process for monitoring progress.

The district office and/or school principal analyze state/district assessment data; teachers only receive the results of the analysis.

Role of parents

Some teachers are very attentive to parents and how they can support their children's learning, but the staff as a whole has not envisioned an active role for parents.

Teachers are given the message that parents are important partners in children's learning, but they have had no training in how to work effectively with parents, particularly parents whose cultures or socio-economic groups differ from their own.



See the poster inside for examples of on-target literacy practices for the early grades.

On-Target Literacy Practices FOR THE EARLY GRADES LAB

Test preparation, practice testing, and test taking skills are taken seriously at these schools.

Throughout the year as part of routine daily work, teachers provide students with assessment items that are similar to those found on formal assessments.

Students use simple rubrics to assess their own and peer students' work on a regular basis throughout the year.

5

Reading instruction occurs in small groups so that teachers can focus on students' individual needs.

Staff make a conscious effort to create small classes to enable staff to know all their students well. Professional development supports teachers by providing skills and techniques for engaging all students in these small group settings.

The school uses multiple strategies to reduce the size of instructional groups (for example, by bringing Title I teachers or other staff, specialists, parents, and volunteers into the elementary classrooms to support reading instruction).

School staff review student work, assessments, and other data to inform and improve instruction.

Teachers meet regularly in grade-level groups to review student work and to discuss which instructional strategies lead to proficiency.

Several times a year, the entire school staff meets to analyze and interpret the meaning of state and district assessment results for changes in instruction.

Each individual student's progress is assessed on a quarterly basis by a team that uses work samples, running records, and formal assessments.

Literacy is taught through a range of techniques that combine literature-based and phonics approaches and provide students with continual opportunities for applying literacy skills.

Students are surrounded with literature and are given opportunities to read and be read to; staff also teach specific skills through reading, writing, speech, and music.

The school uses a consistent management system or textbook series that provides a common base across classes/grades and ensures that individual students progress on important skills.

Staff emphasize the application of literacy skills in context.

6

Professional development supports real change in instruction and continuous deepening of teacher knowledge.

The school provides ongoing, high-quality professional development to all staff in order to support long-term changes in student reading performance.

The professional development program promotes a strong conceptual basis in literacy development and a common model for literacy instruction.

7

School staff have created effective ways to work together and support each other; principals demonstrate their appreciation for the experience and dedication of staff and support them in many ways.

All staff participate in mutually supportive structures such as a common planning time, collaborative decision-making processes, and teaming.

Principals establish a climate in which teachers are encouraged to improve their skills. Principals take an active role in analyzing student and teacher needs, seeking resources, supporting professional development, and arranging schedules to allow for teacher interaction.

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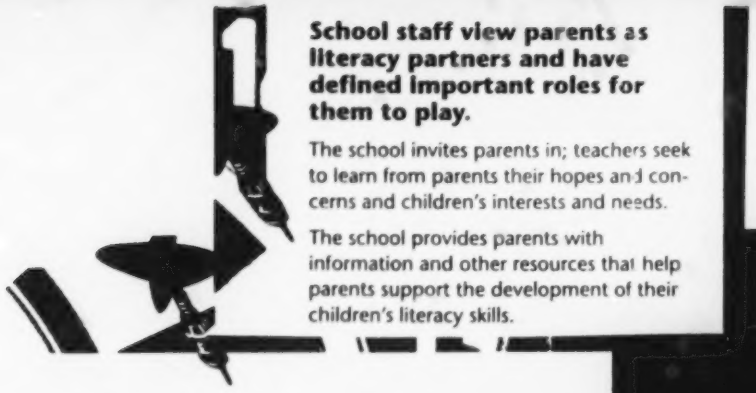

School staff view parents as literacy partners and have defined important roles for them to play.

The school invites parents in; teachers seek to learn from parents their hopes and concerns and children's interests and needs.

The school provides parents with information and other resources that help parents support the development of their children's literacy skills.

The school emphasizes reading and literacy through literacy instruction and extended reading and writing activities that increase exposure to literacy.

Blocks of time devoted to literacy are uninterrupted; instructional routines ensure that each child is reading or writing throughout the entire literacy time block.

The schools supplement classroom literacy instruction with extended reading/writing activities—home reading, homework, after-school tutoring, summer enrichment programs, oral reading during lunch hour, and parent-student activities.

The schools allow at least two hours per day, five days per week for instructional time for literacy.

The schools are student-centered organizations with clear academic expectations for students.

School staff take ownership and responsibility for all the children of the school—not only those in their own classes. A "can do" attitude is pervasive among staff members

Students are flexibly grouped and regrouped to match needs with instructional opportunities.

Schools find multiple ways to use Title I and other instructional resources (for example, to create extended time, provide in-class tutors as needed, and work with small groups during reading times).

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Frequently, in describing good educational practices, researchers provide educators with general principles. Unfortunately, when presented with a checklist of general principles, practitioners often assume that they are already implementing *all* of the practices implied. But they may be missing the subtleties of effective educational practice that really make a difference in teaching and learning. Further, it is the sum *total* of practices that makes the difference for student results and the overall school culture — not any one practice.

This poster suggests nine effective practices associated with improved student performance in the early grades. The practices are from a study of elementary schools with higher than average performance on literacy outcomes. The poster includes specific "on target" examples of the nine literacy principles and a separate page lists "off target" practices that "miss the point" — practices that will not lead to strong student performance.

The information in the poster can be used by teams of educators to spark discussion about current practices and how well they match identified best practices. A discussion could begin either with the on-target poster or the off-target list. If beginning with the off-target list, the discussion should focus on why the practices described are not optimal, how closely those listed match the school's current approaches, and how current practices could be improved. If beginning with the on-target poster, the discussion might focus on how the current examples of effective practices in the school could be extended to include some of the other best practices on the poster.

Selected References on Early Literacy Research

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